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ABSTRACT

This study explored experiences of 10 Ontario parents of adolescents with mental retardation concerning integrated versus contained elementary and secondary school placements, especially attitudes about curriculum, social acceptance, support services, educators, and advocacy. All students were currently in a contained placement but had experience in both integrated and contained settings. Data gathered included a profile sheet, a questionnaire, a review of the Ontario Student Record, and a home interview. Results indicated that most parents were dissatisfied with integrated educational placements primarily because they perceived their children to be lonely and socially isolated. Parents also identified concerns with the mainstream curriculum. Conversely, parents tended to express satisfaction with contained educational placements as they perceived their children to be happy, have friends, and be engaged in meaningful appropriate curriculum. Parents perceived administrators and teachers to be accepting of their children in both integrated and contained settings. Funding and support services for mainstream placement were considered inadequate. Most parents were not given choices regarding educational placement at the secondary level. Results support the need to continue to offer a range of placement options. Appendices contain forms used in the study, the questionnaire, and a table showing enrollment and level of integration by exceptionality. (Contains approximately 65 references.) (DB)

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# Parental Perspectives on Integrated as Opposed to Contained Class Placements for Developmentally Challenged Children

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## ABSTRACT

Educational reform in Ontario is moving toward the integration of exceptional pupils as the norm. At the same time, parents are increasingly acknowledged as playing an important, multi-faceted role in the education of their children. Although there has been considerable research on how and why to integrate, in Canada there has been relatively little research to investigate the perspectives of parents based on experience. This study examined parental perspectives on integrated as opposed to contained educational placements for developmentally challenged children. Specifically, this study explored parent experience with elementary and secondary school placements in terms of curriculum, social acceptance, support services, educators, and advocacy. Data were gathered by means of a profile sheet, a questionnaire, a review of the Ontario Student Record, and a home interview. Results of this study indicated that the majority of parents were dissatisfied with an integrated educational placement primarily because they perceived their children to be lonely and socially isolated. The parents also identified concerns with curriculum in the mainstream. Conversely, these same parents expressed satisfaction with the contained educational placement as they perceived their children to be happy, to have friends, and to be engaged in meaningful,

appropriate curriculum. Parents perceived administrators and teachers to be accepting of their children in both integrated and contained settings. Funding and support services for mainstream placement were considered inadequate, although all parents acknowledged the important role educational assistants had to play. Most parents consistently participated in the Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) process and Individual Education Plan (IEP) development, and all had become advocates for their children. Although the Ontario Ministry of Education encourages integration as the norm, the majority of parents were not given choices with respect to educational placement at the secondary level. The parents identified concerns about future employability, acceptance in society, and vulnerability. Results from this study reinforce the need for Boards of Education to continue to offer a range of placement options. In addition, these results suggest that it is important for the Ministry of Education and educators to acknowledge the important role parents have as advocates for their children. Further research to examine the perceptions of both parents and students is necessary to support these research findings.

## Acknowledgements

First, I would like to acknowledge my daughter Kelly, and her special struggle to discover and belong in a social niche. In addition, I would like to recognize Kelly's peers and their parents, who openly shared their experiences, enabling me to produce a collaborative research study.

Thank you to my husband Bill for supporting me with love and encouragement in my educational endeavours (I'm not finished yet!). To my children Kelly, Kristi, Kimberley, Tiffany, and Michael, thank you for inspiring me to model the goal of lifelong learning. To my father, thank you for instilling in me a passion to learn. To my mother, a very special thank you for providing me with the opportunities you yourself sacrificed, and for always believing in me.

Finally, I would like to express sincere appreciation to my "taskmaster", Dr. Helen Stewart. Helen, with unswerving diligence, you guided me to critically analyze and refine my research study, from inception to completion. Throughout the entire process, I could rely on both your encouragement to bolster my spirits and your ability to place things in perspective. Indeed, you have my professional respect and admiration. I cannot imagine a finer faculty adviser.

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# CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM

## Introduction

This study was an examination of parental perspectives on integrated as opposed to contained educational placements for developmentally challenged children; the purpose was to determine some of the reasons governing parents' decisions regarding their children's programs.

## Background of the Problem

Advocacy for the developmentally challenged, legislative changes, and societal trends towards equality and educational reform have created the climate for a paradigm shift with respect to the integration and education of students with disabilities (Porter & Richler, 1991). Yet parents continue to place their developmentally challenged (DC) children in contained classes at the secondary level even though integration as the norm is advocated. As the parent of a DC adolescent in a contained class, and as a resource teacher for integrated DC students at the elementary level, the researcher has personal and professional interests in examining parental perspectives on integrated and contained placements. Although there has been considerable research on why and how to integrate, in Canada there has been relatively little research to explore parental perspectives based on experience.

## Statement of the Problem Situation

Why are parental perspectives important? Parents, advocating for their children, can be viewed as the consumers of education. As such, parents can provide important perspectives on educational matters pertaining to their children. Although involvement of parents has long been a focus for elementary schools (Ferguson, 1995), the importance of parental perspectives goes beyond merely an evolving partnership between home and school. In December 1994 the Royal Commission on Learning (citation) released a report entitled For the Love of Learning, which provided a blueprint for educational reform in Ontario schools in order to equip all students for the challenges of the 21st century. The report acknowledged the important role parents play in the education of their children, and recommended that parents participate in the governance of the education system through involvement with school-community councils. With respect to the interests of exceptional pupils, the Ontario Ministry of Education (Hutcheon, 1994) released a memorandum in June 1994 that outlined a range of new initiatives. Specifically, these initiatives sought to empower parents through increased Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) involvement and decision making. In a time of educational reform in Ontario, parents represent a multi-faceted component of that reform.

Ultimately, their perspectives can influence educational policy and practice.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore parents' experience with elementary and secondary school placements in terms of curriculum, social acceptance, support services, educators, and advocacy. The researcher anticipates that parental experience with contained class placements would be more positive than with mainstreamed placements. Consideration of the factors for the relative satisfaction or dissatisfaction for each placement will be of interest to educators as the province of Ontario moves toward integration of exceptional pupils as the norm (Commission, 1994; Hutcheon, 1994). The researcher believes that the results of this study will contribute to the knowledge base on integration and will have important implications for the practice of educating mentally handicapped students.

## Definitions

Specific educational terminologies utilized in this paper are defined for clarification:

Mental Retardation: This is probably the most widely recognized term which describes individuals with a

significant degree of impairment in both cognitive functioning and adaptive behaviour.

Developmentally Challenged: This is one of several alternate terms used by school boards, parents, and various associations. At various times these groups use mentally handicapped, intellectually handicapped, developmentally delayed, and developmentally disabled in order to avoid the pejorative connotations that the words tend to acquire. The researcher selected the term developmentally challenged for her research as it reflects current practice within the Peel Board of Education and the Council for Exceptional Children's Ontario Subdivision on Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities. But in consideration of past and current research, the terms mentally retarded, mentally handicapped, and developmentally challenged are used interchangeably in this paper.

Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC): Ontario Ministry of Education Regulation 305 (Carswell, 1994) requires that each Board of Education establish an IPRC to identify a students' needs, determine exceptionality, recommend a special education placement, and review the placement once every 12 months. In addition, Regulation 305 provides for the establishment of Committees to deal with an appeal process for parents unhappy with the IPRC decision.

Individual Education Plan (IEP): The IEP outlines the special education program and special education services deemed necessary in meeting the identified needs of the exceptional pupil.

Contained Class: This term refers to the educational placement of students with special learning needs in a self-contained, special education class or setting. Inclusion advocates refer to this placement as segregation.

Inclusion: Inclusion is a social concept based on the premise that all children belong together, regardless of ability or disability. Translated to practice, inclusion refers to educating all children in the mainstream and providing support based on individual need.

Integration: Integration can be defined as the provision of instruction for an exceptional student in a regular classroom, in a way that allows for a range of placement options. In this paper, integration refers to the full time placement of a DC student in a regular class.

Mainstreaming: Mainstreaming is a term which refers to the education of exceptional students in regular education programs with the appropriate support services. The terms mainstreaming and integration are considered to be synonymous in this paper.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): An important statute in U.S. legislation, commonly known as Public Law 94-142, requires that the principle of LRE be applied to handicapped students so that they are educated in an environment that restricts them the least from interacting with their nondisabled peers (Smith, Polloway, Patton, & Dowdy, 1995).

Normalization: The principle of normalization is based on the assumption that the least restrictive and most normal environment best facilitates the growth and development of individuals with mental retardation (Strobino, 1986, p. 2).

## Outline of the Remainder of the Document

This study compared parent perspectives based on experience with contained and integrated educational placements. Quantitative research questions explored curricular, social, teacher, administrator, and parental involvement issues. Qualitative research questions elaborated on parents' experiences with placements and explored the reasons for selecting a contained class at the secondary level. Chapter 2 presents a review of special education in Ontario, and examines the literature and research directly related to this study. The third chapter outlines the methodology and procedures. Chapter 4 reports

on the findings of this study and includes illustrative tables and figures. The final chapter provides a summary of the research study, discusses the conclusions, and outlines the implications for practice and further research.

# CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

## Introduction

Although an extensive literature search yields thousands of references to mainstreaming, very few of them contain the descriptors "mentally handicapped" and "parent attitudes". Several difficulties in obtaining relevant studies are readily apparent. The first problem lies with the use of terminology. Some studies refer to students with mild, moderate, and severe mental handicaps, while others refer to students with learning difficulties. It is difficult to determine whether the two terms are synonymous. Second, integration or integrated setting is not always clearly defined. Third, description of research methodology in many studies is scanty. There is often reference to surveys and interviews without elaboration. In order to provide a context for this small study, this chapter examines the history of special education in Ontario for individuals with mental retardation; this chapter also surveys relevant legislation and educational reform, and reviews research on integration, segregation, and parental perspectives.

## Definition and Classification

### The American Association for the Mentally Retarded

(AAMR) (1992) revised its definition of mental retardation:

> Mental retardation refers to substantial limitations in present functioning. It is manifested by significantly subaverage intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with related limitations in two or more of the following applicable adaptive skill areas: communication, home living, social skills, community use, self-direction, health and safety, functional academics, leisure and work. Mental retardation begins before age 18. (Smith et al., 1995, p. 132)

The AAMR further outlined four key assumptions which provide further context for the definition (see Appendix A). Weber (1994) suggests that, "While the parameters of the definition are under constant review, there seems to be stable acceptance that a mental handicap is defined by the presence of three interrelated factors: a) subaverage intellectual functioning, resulting in or associated with, b) problems in adaptive behaviour, c) manifested during the developmental period" (p. 77). Mental retardation, in addition to being defined, has historically been classified by both etiology and level of severity. As Smith et al. (1995) point out, the classification system developed by the AAMR is the one most often cited in professional literature. This system utilizes the terms mild, moderate, severe, and

profound, which are based on cognitive functioning (IQ scores' and adaptive behaviour assessments. In Ontario, for educational purposes, students with mental retardation are generally identified as educable mentally retarded (IQ score of 50-75), trainable mentally retarded (IQ score of 25-49), and custodial (IQ score of below 25). The Ontario Ministry of Education does not, however, mandate consistent use of either definition or terminology across the province. Currently, the Ministry is proposing to shift away from the use of the current terms, trainable mentally retarded and educable mentally retarded, in favour of developmentally disabled and mildly intellectually disabled, respectively, with new identification criteria.

## Review of Special Education in Ontario

In Ontario, special education per se began with the opening of institutions such as the school for the blind in Toronto in 1872 and one for the mentally retarded in Orillia in 1876. According to Weber (1988), the creation of these institutions represented a developing sense of social responsibility for and awareness of people with handicaps.

Until the mid 1960s, most mentally retarded individuals were considered to be uneducable and thus, were provided with custodial care. Weber (1988) suggested that at about that time there occurred a philosophical shift toward social

integration and universal education. The change in attitude evolved for a variety of reasons including: the normalization principle, acknowledgement of educable potential, parent and association advocacy, and the passing of "The Education for All Handicapped Children Act" also known as Public Law (PL) 94-142. Weber further suggests that, as a pioneering model, PL 94-142 has profoundly affected special education practice, specifically with respect to educating exceptional students in regular education programs.

Through the 1970s and 1980s, many Boards of Education and the Ministry of Education began investigating various aspects of integrating mentally handicapped students. Research focussed on integration into a regular school setting, in either a contained or integrated class (Cassie, 1977; Goodlet, 1980; Hambleton, 1974; Hambleton, 1975; Jackson, 1979; Jackson, 1982; Nash, 1975; Watkin, 1982). In addition, other research explored socialization effects (MacLeod, 1978), teacher attitudes (McMurray, 1979; Robinson-Whiteside, 1986), and peer attitudes (Renand, 1987). Most of the research supported the concept of integration based on perceived social benefits including peer and teacher acceptance, better behaviour, improved language, increased independence, and increased social interaction.

With the advent of the Education Amendment Act in 1980,

commonly referred to as Bill 82, school systems have sought to expand service delivery to include a broad range of exceptional students. Stanovich and Jordan (1995) noted that the most common response has been to restructure service delivery by increasing the mainstreaming and inclusion of exceptional students in regular education programs. In Canada, this practice is generally known as integration, or increasingly, as inclusive education. In Mainstreaming - Some Issues for School Boards, the Canadian Educators Association (CEA) (1985) stated that there must be a selective placement of children into regular programs; not all exceptional pupils should or can be integrated. This position is consistent with the Ministry's Memorandum (Hutcheon, 1994) which reiterates a commitment to integration as normal practice, but with a range of placement options for students whose needs cannot be met in the regular classroom. Currently, most Boards either offer a range of placement options and a continuum of service, or purchase service from another board. Although a range of placement options exists, a review of the Enrolment of Exceptional Students (based on the 1993-94 September Report, see Appendix B) revealed that the majority of students with mental retardation remain in contained classes in Ontario. Table 1 compared the total number of students with intellectual and developmental disabilities in special education classes as opposed to regular classes in both

## Table 1. Enrolment of Intellectually Disabled Students, 1993-94

| Exceptionality | Special Education Classe | Regular Classes | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mildly intellectually disabled | 8075 | 5846 | **13921** |
| Developmentally disabled | 4720 | 842 | **5562** |
| **Total** | **12795** | 6328 | **19483** |

elementary and secondary schools. Sixty-six percent of the students were in contained special education classes compared to 34% in regular classes.

## Legislation and Special Education

In Ontario, the Acts, Regulations, and Policies established by the Ministry of Education govern general educational services. Legislation from both federal and provincial governments has the potential to impact on special education. Although the practice of special education in Ontario is founded on the right of every student to access publicly supported education (Bill 82), Ontario law is not prescriptive with respect to integration (Weber, 1988). Nor does it mandate provision of the "least restrictive or most enabling environment" for exceptional students. Rather, it suggests suitable programming and encourages boards to provide a range of placement options and a continuum of service (see Figure 1). Presently, the needs of some pupils are deemed to require a more highly specialized program (i.e., a self-contained setting).

However, while education is an area of provincial jurisdiction, the context in which provincial education legislation operates underwent a dramatic shift when the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Charter) was entrenched in the Canadian Constitution in 1982 (Porter &

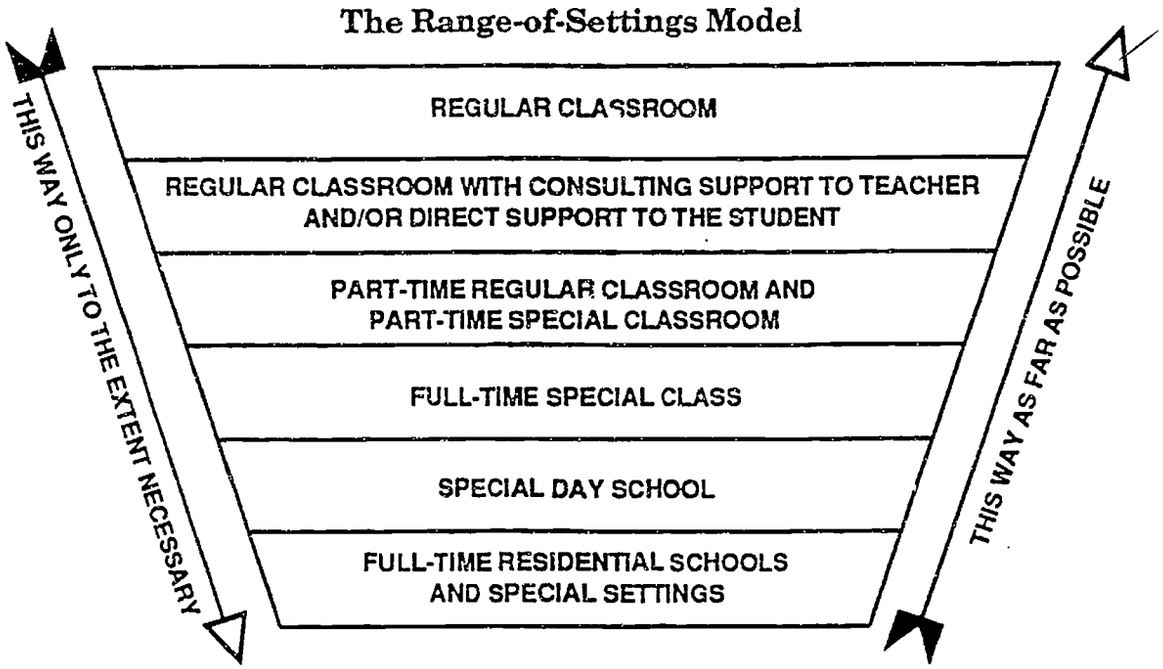


Figure 1. The Range of Settings Model

(Used with permission from K. Weber, Special Education in Canadian Schools, 1994, p. 28)

Richler, 1991). In 1985, equality rights for people with mental handicaps came into effect in the Charter, guaranteeing freedom from discrimination on the basis of mental disability. According to Porter and Richler (1991), individuals with mental handicaps have historically been subjected to two forms of segregation or discrimination: (1) de jure segregation, which means segregation sanctioned by actual laws (e.g., the law that prohibited people with a mental handicap from voting), and (2) de facto segregation, which refers to the various customs or practices that separate and exclude people labelled as mentally handicapped -- customs or practices which are taken as facts of life but have no legal sanction (e.g., the customs and practices of confining people with mental handicaps in institutions). As a result of the Charter, Porter and Richler believe that both de jure and de facto forms of discrimination are open to challenge in court.

With respect to education for children with mental handicaps, both forms of segregation continue to exist. Porter and Richler (1991) noted that in some provinces Education Acts have made specific provisions for children with mental handicaps to be educated in special schools and classrooms (*de jure*), while in some school boards, the practice and policy has been to treat handicapped children as specic and in need of separate programs outside the regular classroom (*de facto*). Both the *Charter* and the

*Canadian Human Rights Act* have provided parents with legislative support to challenge educational segregation and obtain an integrated education for their children. A case in point is the Ontario Court of Appeal (1995) decision regarding Emily Eaton, a 10 year-old student with cerebral palsy. The Brant County Board of Education wanted Emily to be placed in a contained class for physically challenged children. Her parents appealed the IPRC decision to a special education tribunal, and subsequently to the Ontario Divisional Court. The Court of Appeal held that segregating a child because of her disability violates her equality rights under Section 15(1) of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The Court concluded that the Education Act is unconstitutional in that it gives school boards the unilateral discretion to place children with disabilities in segregated classes. The Court ordered that a provision be read into the Education Act preventing boards from placing disabled students in segregated programs against their parents' wishes, except as a last resort. This provision empowers parents to advocate for a mainstream placement during the IPRC process. School boards are therefore obliged to choose the least segregated placement possible which meets the student's needs.

In Canada, New Brunswick is the only province to date to have enacted progressive legislation to accommodate the integration of exceptional children. Passed by the New

Brunswick Legislature in 1986, Bill 85 directs that a school board:

> Shall place all exceptional pupils such that they receive special education programs in circumstances where exceptional pupils can participate with pupils who are not exceptional pupils within regular classroom settings to the extent that is considered practicable by the school board having due regard for the educational needs of all pupils.

## Educational Reform

Ontario may yet move in the direction New Brunswick has taken towards a more inclusive system of education for the mentally handicapped. In April 1989, the Government of Ontario announced a set of initiatives to restructure education; destreaming Grade 9 would be one component. Essentially, destreaming, by grouping all students instead of placing them in basic, general, or advanced level courses, would seek to provide greater access to learning for students of varied abilities, cultures, and socio-economic backgrounds. Subsequently (and perhaps in part influenced by the educational ideal of equity of opportunity), then Education Minister Marion Boyd announced in May 1991 that a consultation process would be undertaken "to decide how best to further the integration of

exceptional pupils into regular classrooms in local community schools" (Boyd, 1991, p. 1). To facilitate this process, the Ontario Ministry released a Consultation Paper on the Integration of Exceptional Pupils in January 1992 (citation). The Consultation Paper invited responses from the education community, organizations, and individuals, covering a range of topics including: (a) partnership with parents; (b) range of placements; (c) schools and classrooms, with regard to teacher preparation, resources, class size, and restructuring education; (d) the building of additional partnerships; and (e) funding. In essence, at the time, the provincial government of Ontario appeared to view the commitment to integrating exceptional pupils as reflective of an open and more integrated society--a commitment in keeping with their mandate of social reform. The Ministry's Memorandum (Hutcheor , 1994) outlined initiatives directing IPRC's to consider integration as the placement of first choice, while recognizing the need to maintain a range of placement considerations for students whose needs cannot be met through integration. To support integration, the Ministry proposed a focus on: (a) increased parental involvement in the IPRC; (b) allocation of funds for staff development; (c) recognition of exemplary practices in integration; (d) encouragement of school boards to revise their special education plans to facilitate integration; and (e) revision of categories and definitions

of exceptionalities to make them consistent with other changes in special education. With specific reference to parents and the IPRC process, the Ministry proposed two key changes to Regulation 305:

1. IPRCs will be required to consider integration as the placement of first choice whenever possible, when such a placement meets the pupil's needs and is in accordance with parental wishes.
2. The role of parents in the IPRC process will be strengthened to ensure that they have a right to early and full access to all information; the right to an advocate; to be full partners in the deliberations and to have an equal say in the composition of the appeal board members.

For the Love of Learning (Royal Commission, 1994) also recommended the integration of students with special needs into regular classrooms in combination with an available range of other placements as necessary. The matter of choice is critical for parents, whether their beliefs and/or experiences support either integration or a contained placement. For the Love of Learning further stressed the need for schools to work collaboratively with parents; recognizing that parents have a central role to play in the education of their children, the document recommended the development of a Parents' Charter of Rights and Responsibilities. The Ministry of Education, then, appeared

committed to the concepts of parental involvement and advocacy for their children's education.

## Integration vs. Congregation: The Great Debate

Many educators currently agree that integration of students with special needs is preferable to segregation; controversy seems to stem from how this principle translates into action. According to Weber (1994), advocates who regard the principle of integration as absolute, are not opposed to special education service provided that it occurs in the mainstream. However, there are educators and parents who maintain that some exceptional pupils need a slightly more restrictive environment within a regular school for a portion of their program. But integration advocates respond that the existence of alternate settings sets up integration for failure. Resolution is not easy to achieve and research is equivocal as to what kind of mainstreaming is best (Weber, 1994).

Advocates for integration maintain that, in the research, evidence exists to support integration as the most beneficial placement for exceptional pupils. However, examination of the empirical evidence does not support this claim (Howarth, 1983; Peel Board, 1989; Stanovich & Jordan, 1995; Weber, 1994). Weber (1994) maintained that much of the research is flawed by small populations and by the

extreme difficulty inherent in all research on human subjects, namely that of controlling variables so that the results will have wide and general applicability. Most of the work to date has been descriptive or impressionistic, rather than empirical.

## Parental and Student Perspectives

A thorough search of the literature yields a paucity of studies that have examined parental perspectives. Most of the literature exploring educational placements for DC students has focused on attitudes of educators, and to a lesser extent, the social attitude/acceptance of DC students and/or their peers. The few research reports which have included parents of DC students report primarily on parental satisfaction with a mainstreamed placement (Kidd & Hornby, 1993; Lancaster, 1995; Marwell, 1990). Freeman, Kasari, and Alkin (1995), and Saint-Laurent and Fournier (1993) examined the variables related to parents' satisfaction for students in either regular or special classes. Previous and current research supports the importance of obtaining parental views and considering parents' perceptions when determining educational placements (Freeman, Kasari, & Alkin, 1995; Kidd & Hornby, 1993; Mylnek, Hannah, & Hamlin, 1982; Wilgosh & Chomicki, 1994). Wilgosh, Waggoner and Adams (1988) determined that teacher training, parent advocacy, social

isolation, and adulthood were important concerns for parents.

Much of the previous research involving parents' perceptions focussed on mainstreamed settings. Kidd and Hornby (1993) conducted a survey of children with moderate learning difficulties who transferred from a special school to the mainstream. Results from surveying both parents and students indicated that the majority were satisfied with the transfer to mainstream, while a significant minority were not. Respondents reported greater satisfaction when students were placed in a resource-based teaching system as opposed to a straight mainstream class setting. Of interest to the researcher was the finding that students who were grouped together in the mainstream were more satisfied than those integrated individually. Kidd and Hornby noted that the findings of their study reinforce the value of gaining parents' perspectives of educational placements.

The present research study proposed to examine parental experience with various educational placements as it relates to parent satisfaction. Saint-Laurent and Fournier (1993) investigated the variables related to parent satisfaction with their children's education and the relationship of parent satisfaction to student progress in the areas of academic achievement and adaptive behaviour. Results indicated that 93.8% of parents were satisfied with the education their children received, regardless of the type of

program or placement. The variables identified as determining overall parents' satisfaction were communication with school and perception of academic progress. These results would not appear to support the present researcher's hypothesis that parental satisfaction is a function of educational placement. However, it should be noted that Saint-Laurent and Fournier did not include as variables on their questionnaire the perceived social factors such as happiness/loneliness or acceptance/isolation. Nonetheless, this study is important to the researcher in that it identifies the need for educational research on children with intellectual disabilities to include data regarding the level of parents' satisfaction.

Researchers other than Saint-Laurent and Fournier (1993) have acknowledged the importance of obtaining parental perspectives. Freeman, Kasari, and Alkin (1995) recently examined parents' perceptions of educational opportunities for children with Down Syndrome. Parents responded to a survey which sought information about demographics, current educational program, and "ideal" educational program for their children. The primary focus of the research was on the qualitative responses on the issue of "ideal program". With respect to ideal program, parents of younger children were more likely to choose inclusion with specialized services, while parents of older children were more likely to choose mainstreaming for

nonacademics. Freeman, Kasari, and Alkin concluded that their research results suggest that "educators should consider parent perceptions when making recommendations for the educational placement of children with Down Syndrome" (p. 3).

Mylnek, Hannah, and Hamlin (1982) also surveyed parents of learning disabled, mentally retarded, and emotionally disturbed children to determine their reactions to mainstreaming handicapped children. In the opinion of these researchers, parents have the right, as partners in the educational system, to participate in determining their child's placement. Thus, systematic information concerning parent views is critical. In the Mylneck et al. study, parents participated in a two-part survey consisting of an information section and a 5-point Likert-type scale survey of statements on mainstreaming and its effects. The researchers analyzed data in terms of background variables and questionnaire items using contingency tables, correlation coefficients, and chi-squares. Results indicated that parents of learning disabled children were more supportive of mainstreaming than the parents of children with mental retardation or emotional difficulties. Mylnek, Hannah, and Hamlin cautioned against generalization of these results given that the amount of experience with mainstreaming could not be controlled for and that all parents were members of an association concerned with their

child's handicapping condition. The Mylnek et al. study, as an empirical investigation into parents' attitudes, reinforced for the present researcher, the philosophical basis for investigating parent perspectives.

Apart from research studies, parents have the opportunity to express their views through conferences, conventions, and forums. Wilgosh and Chomicki reported on a parent panel presentation entitled "Parent Views on Inclusion" at the Severe Handicaps Alliance for Public Education in May 1994. The four parents shared their expectations of and experience with inclusive education, and their frustrations with education. Given that Alberta recently formalized its policy on inclusive education, that regular class placement be the first option, Wilgosh and Chomicki maintained that what educators can learn from parents will facilitate the development of inclusive education programs and practices.

In May 1993, this researcher attended a provincial conference sponsored by the Ontario Association for Developmental Education. A panel presentation on parental perspectives on integration presented the views of four parents. Based on their personal experiences, two of the four parents expressed the belief that integration does not work for all children. These parents cited social and behavioural difficulties as the prime reasons for choosing a contained program. The third parent believed that partial

integration, or a "school within a school system" worked best for her daughter. The fourth parent, the father of an eight-year-old, was supportive of full integration without support services. This parent expressed the belief that social acceptance was a two-way street, that his son would be socially accepted only by being with his normal peers, and that the other students would learn how to socially accept others only in the presence of handicapped students. General discussion confirmed that an educational placement could not be generalized for all students, but must be based on individual needs and strengths. In addition, there was general consensus that because blanket policies do not work, a range of placement options is necessary.

Integration is but one placement option for students with developmental challenges. Although integration advocates often cite socialization benefits as an advantage to an integrated setting, others recognize the potential for social isolation. For example, the Royal Commission on Learning (citation) noted that mainstreaming means that children with particular learning differences will not have the company of peers (V.II, p. 109). Luftig (1988) assessed the perceived loneliness and isolation of mentally retarded and nonretarded students in the mainstream. This research was of particular interest to the present researcher given her hypothesis that dissatisfaction of parents with an integrated placement stems, in part, from perceived social

isolation on the part of their children. Luftig assessed perceived school loneliness and isolation using a 5-point, Likert-type loneliness scale. Results indicated that the retarded students perceived themselves to be more lonely than did their nonretarded peers. Luftig suggested that although mainstreaming provides more opportunities for social interaction, it has not reduced social isolation. He further suggested that social skill intervention may be a necessary part of the curriculum in order for an educational environment to be least restrictive. The question remains whether social skills training would indeed be effective.

Parents of children with developmental challenges have concerns about social acceptance that extend beyond the classroom. Wilgosh, Waggoner, and Adams (1988) conducted qualitative research on several sets of families of children with mild, moderate, and severe mental handicaps. The study identified dominant themes relating to parent concerns, primarily with respect to education and daily living. For the purposes of the present study, the Wilgosh, Waggoner, and Adams study is important in that it determined that the parents of mild to moderately handicapped children had concerns with both the social isolation of their child in an integrated setting and the success their children would have in integrating into society in the future. Many parents had become advocates for their children.

In Ontario, various associations advocate on behalf of

individuals with a mental handicap and on behalf of their parents. The Ontario Association for Community Living (ACL) (formerly the Ontario Association for the Mentally Retarded), as the parent organization for local associations, has taken an active role in representing the views of parents, participating in research through the Roeher Institute, and effectively lobbying the government for proactive legislation. Increasingly, local associations are looking to assist parents in the educational partnership with Boards of Education. However, the main focus for ACL is full inclusion, which is not necessarily representative of the views of all parents.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, at present there exists no comparative study which explores parental perspectives based on experience with both mainstreamed and contained placements. Therefore, this study's purpose was to examine parental experience with integrated and contained educational placements and provide a comparative analysis.

## Conclusion

Over the last century, educational opportunities for the mentally handicapped have evolved through societal, attitudinal, educational, and legislative changes. Although research results have been equivocal with regard to the optimal placement for mentally handicapped students, the

Ontario Ministry of Education is moving toward integration as the norm, while maintaining a range of placement options. Earlier research involving parents sought input on their views on mainstreaming, while, recently, research has begun to acknowledge the value of parent perceptions and satisfaction. It would appear that, to date, research has not comparatively examined the actual experiences or perspectives of parents and students in terms of satisfaction with integrated and contained educational placements.

# CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

This chapter describes the population and sample, instruments, data collection, and data analysis.

## Research Design

Subsequent to reviewing previous research involving parents, this researcher recognized the importance of designing a research study utilizing certain aspects of both quantitative and qualitative inquiry methodology in order to ensure validity. Since the researcher intended to examine the perspectives of a defined group of parents, qualitative research seemed appropriate, as in the research conducted by Wilgosh, Waggoner, and Adams (1988) and others. Specifically, the educational ethnography approach used by such researchers seeks meaning from observations and perceptions (MacMillan & Schumacher, 1989). Selecting a small group of parents likely to be knowledgeable about the research questions was consistent with purposeful sampling. However, the same population could also be considered under the category of convenience sampling since the researcher did not have access to a larger or more diverse group. The researcher selected the multiple data collection strategies employed by Loeffelhardt and Lindblad (1992) in their research on parents of children diagnosed with High Functioning Pervasive Developmental Disorder. These

strategies included the use of archival records (Ontario Student Records), a fact (profile) sheet, a scaled item questionnaire, and an ethnographic interview utilizing an interview guide approach. Essentially, the research became an ethnographic study employing a mixed methodological approach to data collection and analysis.

## Population and Sample

For the purposes of this study, the population was restricted to the parents of DC adolescent students who were attending a regional program for students identified as either educable or trainable mentally retarded. The regional program was comprised of three contained classes, with a maximum instructional ratio of 10:1, and was located at an urban vocational secondary school.

Since it was not known at the outset of the study whether all students had experience in both integrated and contained educational settings, or if all students had been identified as having an intellectual exceptionality, parents of all the students were invited to participate in this research study. A total of 23 research packages were distributed. By the deadline, 13 respondents had returned the packages for a response rate of 57%. Because three students or 23% did not meet the criteria for inclusion in the study, their parents were eliminated. Seventy-seven

percent (n = 10) of the respondents were accepted for inclusion in the study.

The parents completed a survey consisting of a questionnaire and a profile sheet on their child. Through a consent form, the researcher gained access to the Ontario Student Record and special services files in order to develop a profile on educational placements. Eighty percent of the parents indicated a willingness to participate in a home interview.

## Instrumentation

The researcher initially sent a package to the 23 parents whose children attended a contained class for the developmentally challenged. The package contained a letter of introduction, a consent form, a profile sheet (demographic instrument), and a 22 question survey. (Samples included in Appendices C, D, E, and F)

The profile sheet (Appendix E) gathered demographic information from the parents on student gender, age, diagnosis, exceptionality, IPRC involvement, class placement, advocacy, support services, and parental expectations regarding curriculum.

The parents then completed the survey (Appendix F) which required them to respond to statements using a Likert scale from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). The

statements gathered information pertaining to experience with integrated and contained educational placements, involvement with the Board of Education, and advocacy within the context of their own child's educational experiences.

The first 11 statements examined parental perception of previous integrated educational placements. Statement 1 required parents to decide if their child's academic needs had best been met in the mainstream. Statement 4 addressed the adequacy of curriculum modification to meet individual needs in the mainstream. Statements 2, 3, 5, and 10 gauged the parent's assessment of the child's sense of happiness and social acceptance. Statements 6 and 7 dealt with parent perceptions of the child's acceptance by teachers and administration. Statements 8 and 11 determined whether support services and funding were adequate for mainstreamed students. Statement 9 assessed the importance of teaching assistants as a support for the integrated DC student.

Statements 12 through 17 explored parental perception of the contained educational placements. Statement 12 invited parents to indicate the level of satisfaction with the ability of the current contained placement in meeting their child's academic needs. Statements 13 and 14 examined friendships and happiness within the contained setting. Statement 15 looked at teacher attitude towards the DC student. Statement 16 compared teachers in contained and integrated classes with respect to training and program

delivery. Statement 17 dealt with administrator support of the contained class.

Statements 18, 19, and 20 reviewed parental involvement with the IPRC process, IEP development, and how the Board of Education values parental opinion.

Statements 21 and 22 explored the role and importance of advocacy for the DC child.

A review of the OSRs provided additional data to develop a profile on previous class placements and programs, and confirmed the data on the profile sheet.

All eight parents who indicated a willingness to do so, participated in individual interviews at their homes. The researcher established an easy and comfortable rapport with each of the parents, assisted by the common experience of having a child with special needs. The researcher assumed an interactive role in this form of data collection, using an interview guide approach. This interview format allowed for conversations to develop naturally, while incorporating the four key open-ended questions which were fairly specific in intent. All parents agreed to have the interviews tape recorded, and subsequently transcribed by the researcher. Reflections and elaborations on the actual interviews supplemented the transcripts. The interview provided an opportunity to collaboratively explore the issues related to educational placement and curriculum for the developmentally challenged. In addition, the interview allowed for a

comparative examination of experiences and perspectives between integrated and contained placements.

## Methodological Assumptions

Personal and professional experience with both integrated and contained programs has provided the researcher with opportunities to informally evaluate the effectiveness of each program. Although many factors influence the perceptions of the effectiveness of integration, parental experience, perspective, and satisfaction are not often identified as indicators of a successful program. With respect to this study, the researcher assumed that parent/student experience with integrated programs may not have been positive from either curricular or social perspectives and/or that the contained setting better met the needs of the student.

## Design Limitations

Several design limitations restricted the parameters of this study. The first limitation pertained to the size of the population. Although the sample was drawn from a regional program, it was nonetheless relatively small; thus, it may not be possible to generalize the results to a larger population.

Second, the sample did not include parents of students who were currently in mainstream placements at the secondary level. Inclusion of those parents, whose experiences may have been different, might have yielded different results.

Third, the sample population had varying experiences with integrated and contained settings at the elementary level. As evidenced by the profile developed on previous placements, there was a decided lack of consistency in the types of contained elementary placements, and in the levels of support provided in the mainstream. In addition, the amount of time spent in each setting ranged considerably. The researcher was not able to determine if there was consistency with program focus, curricular goals, peer relationships, or integration opportunities. Obviously, with respect to placement, there were many variables that could not be controlled for.

Finally, the literature searches yielded a scarcity of previous studies that sought to explore parental perspectives.

# CHAPTER FOUR: THE RESULTS

## Overview

Chapter four outlines the findings of the survey, review of the OSR, and parent interview. Results of the questionnaire will be presented as an overall frequency of response per statement, in both table and figure format. Demographic information from the profile sheet will be outlined. Previous educational placement data from the OSR will be presented as a comparative profile. Finally, information gathered during the parent interviews will be discussed with a view to identifying predominant themes.

## Profile Sheet

Demographic data were collected from the profile sheets. Question 5, which asked if the student had been in both mainstream and contained classes, and Question 6, which asked for the IPRC's designation, were used to further refine the study group. Of the 13 responses, 10 students had been in both educational settings and had an intellectual exceptionality. From the population of 10, the following data emerged:

* Seven students were female, 3 were male.
* Students ranged in age from 14 - 22; the mean age was 18 years, 5 months.

* At the elementary level, 5 students had attended a public school, 1 student had attended a separate school, and 4 students had attended a private school.
* All 10 students had been identified as exceptional by an IPRC - 9 had an I2 designation (educable mentally retarded) and 1 had an I3 designation (trainable mentally retarded).
* Five students had been diagnosed with a condition or syndrome, including Epilepsy, Melas Syndrome, Down Syndrome, and Tuberous Sclerosis.
* Special class placement and special bussing were the support services received through the school board.
* Community/government support was received through Erinoak, Community Living, Special Olympics, Halton Support Services, and Family Benefits Assistance.
* Six students lived with both parents, 3 students lived with mother only, 1 student was in a residential setting.
* All 10 parents participated in the Parent Support Group at the secondary school.

Question 12 asked parents to identify important curricular areas and rank same in order of priority. Tabulated results are presented in Table 2. Interestingly, the majority of parents ranked social, vocational, communication, and life skills as being more important than functional academics, computer skills, and recreation.

## Table 2. Percentage Response of Ranked Curriculum Areas

| | *most important* | | | | | | *least important* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Curriculum Area:** | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| functional academics | 10 | 0 | 10 | 30 | 0 | 40 | 10 |
| computer skills | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 40 | 50 |
| recreation | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 70 | 10 | 20 |
| vocational skills | 30 | 0 | 10 | 50 | 10 | 0 | 0 |
| social skills | 0 | 60 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 10 |
| life skills | 30 | 40 | 20 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| communications skills | 30 | 0 | 40 | 0 | 20 | 0 | 10 |

## Questionnaire

Table 3 provides a breakdown of the percentage response by statement, utilizing the Likert scale range.

For the purpose of discussion, "strongly agree" and "agree" have been grouped together to reflect general agreement, while "strongly disagree" and "disagree" have been grouped together to reflect general disagreement.

Figure 2 illustrates a comparison between parental responses to Statements 1 and 12 regarding the educational placement that best met their child's academic needs. Eighty percent believed that their child's needs had not been best served in tne mainstream, while 100% responded that the current contained class best met the academic needs. Notwithstanding these responses, 50% of the parents agreed with Statement 4 that the curriculum in the mainstream had been modified to meet their child's needs while 40% disagreed.

Statements 2, 3, and 10 gauged the parents' assessment of their child's sense of happiness. In response to Statement 2, 30% of the parents agreed that their child was happy in the mainstream, 10% were undecided, and 60% disagreed. Twenty percent of parents agreed with Statement 3 that their child had friends in the mainstream, 10% were undecided, and 70% disagreed. In response to Statement 10, 90% of the parents agreed that their child was lonely in the

## Table 3. Percentage Response by Statement

| STATEMENT | SA | A | N | D | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 Placement in a mainstream class best met my child's academic needs. | 0 | 10 | 10 | 40 | 40 |
| 2 My child was happy in the mainstream. | 0 | 30 | 10 | 30 | 30 |
| 3 My child had friends in the mainstream. | 0 | 20 | 10 | 30 | 40 |
| 4 The curriculum in the mainstream was modified to meet my child's needs. | 20 | 30 | 10 | 30 | 10 |
| 5 My child was socially accepted by his\her non-disabled peers in the mainstream. | 0 | 20 | 10 | 40 | 30 |
| 6 Mainstream teachers accepted my child. | 10 | 40 | 30 | 10 | 10 |
| 7 School administrators were supportive of my child's placement in the mainstream. | 0 | 60 | 20 | 20 | 0 |
| 8 Support services were adequate in the mainstream. | 0 | 30 | 20 | 40 | 10 |
| 9 Educational assistants were an important support for my child in the mainstream. | 50 | 50 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 10 My child was lonely in the mainstream. | 50 | 40 | 10 | 0 | 0 |
| 11 Funding is adequate to support special needs children in the mainstream. | 0 | 0 | 70 | 0 | 30 |
| 12 My child's current placement in the contained special education class best meets his/her academic needs. | 50 | 50 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

(table continues)

| STATEMENT | SA | A | N | D | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 13 My child is happier in the contained class. | 50 | 30 | 20 | 0 | 0 |
| 14 My child has friends in the contained class. | 60 | 40 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 15 Teachers in the contained class have a positive attitude towards my child. | 50 | 50 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 16 Teachers in contained classes appear better trained and prepared to program for developmentally challenged students than mainstream teachers. | 50 | 40 | 10 | 0 | 0 |
| 17 School administrators are supportive of the contained class. | 40 | 40 | 20 | 0 | 0 |
| 18 I have consistently had input into the educational placement of my child. | 30 | 70 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 19 I have consistently contributed to the development of my child's Individual Education Plan (I.E.P.). | 10 | 70 | 20 | 0 | 0 |
| 20 I believe the school board values my opinions concerning my child's education. | 0 | 70 | 30 | 0 | 0 |
| 21 I believe it is important to be part of an advocacy group for my child. | 50 | 50 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 22 I have personally become an advocate for my child for educational issues. | 40 | 50 | 10 | 0 | 0 |

SA Strongly Agree
A Agree
N Neutral (Undecided)
D Disagree
SD Strongly Disagree

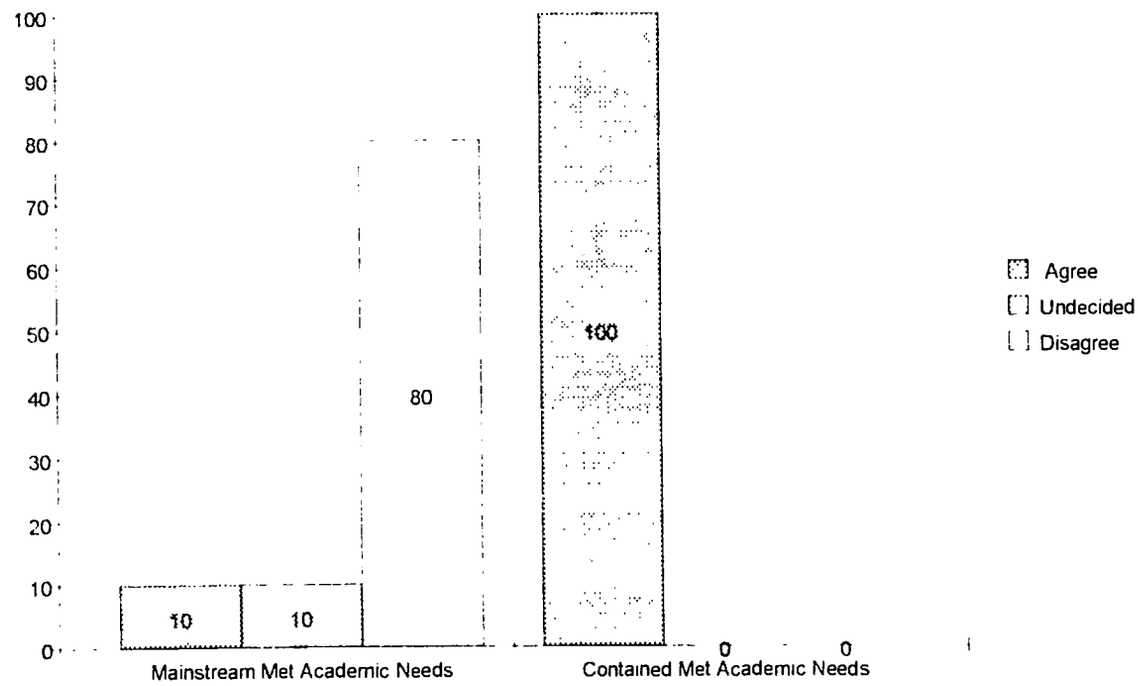


Figure 2. Comparison of Placements Meeting Academic Needs

mainstream while only 10% were undecided. Figure 3 provides a visual representation of the relationship among these three statements.

Parents' perceptions of their child's acceptance in the mainstream were tapped in Statements 5, 6, and 7, as illustrated in Figure 4. Only 20% of parents agreed with Statement 5 that peers had socially accepted their children, 10% were undecided, and 70% disagreed. There was general agreement that both teachers and administrators accepted their children.

Statements 8, 9, and 11 explored perspectives on various types of support in the mainstream. Although every parent identified educational assistants as an important support to mainstream placement, opinions varied on whether support services were adequate. Seventy percent of the parents were undecided and 30% disagreed on the adequacy of funding.

Statements 13 and 14 examined friendships and a sense of happiness within the context of the contained setting. The majority of parents (80%) identified their children as happier in the contained class while only 20% were undecided. All parents agreed that their children had friends in the contained class.

There was general consensus that both the administrators and the teachers in the contained class accepted their children. Interestingly, 90% of the parents

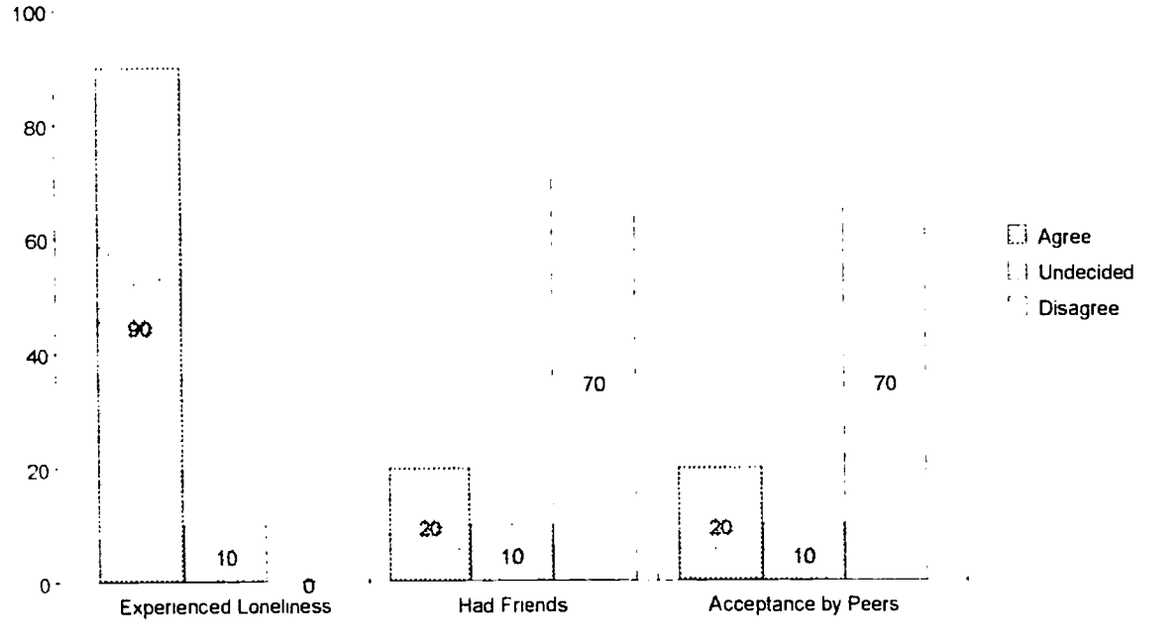


Figure 3. Relationship of Loneliness/Friends/Peer Acceptance in Mainstream

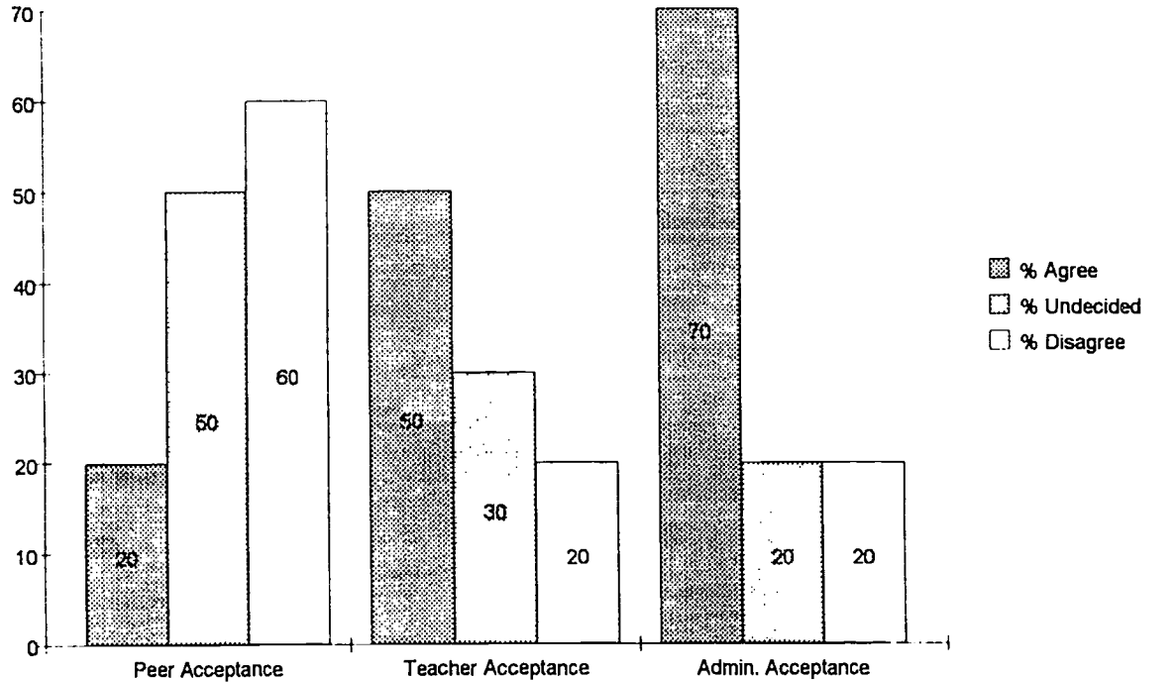


**Figure 4. Perceived Acceptance in the Mainstream**

perceived that the special education teacher is better trained and prepared to teach the DC students than the mainstream teacher.

Results from the next section of the questionnaire reflect the positive nature of parental involvement with the Board of Education. All parents agreed with Statement 18 that they had consistent input into the placement of their child. Eighty percent indicated that they had regularly participated in developing the IEP, while 20% were undecided. A significant majority (70%) believed that the Board valued their opinions while 30% were undecided.

The final section of the questionnaire explored the role and importance of advocacy for the DC child. All parents identified the need to be part of an advocacy group. A very high number (90%) of the respondents had personally become advocates for their children while only 10% remained undecided.

## OSR Review

Part I of the OSR review confirmed data collected on the profile sheet, including name, birthdate, diagnosis and exceptionality.

Part II involved reviewing previous educational placements from the time of school entry to establish an educational profile on each student. Records were

unavailable for 2 students with previous placements in the United States; therefore, 8 profiles were developed. Time spent in a mainstream setting ranged from 6 - 91%, while time spent in the contained class placement ranged from 9 - 94% as shown in the comparative analysis in Figure 5. Fifty percent of the students had spent approximately an equal amount of time in both integrated and contained settings. A wide variety of settings comprised the contained class placements, including primary special, junior special, junior multiple learning disabilities, trainable mentally retarded (TMR), educable mentally retarded (EMR), communicatively handicapped, cluster group, junior special education, primary general learning disability, and self-contained. Most students in the mainstream had received support through a withdrawal or resource program within the school, and\or an educational assistant.

## Personal Interview

### *Describe Your Child's Experiences in the Mainstream.*

Two dominant themes emerged from the parent interviews --perceptions of academic frustration and loneliness. Most parents described the academic program in the mainstream as being too difficult, not modified to meet the child's needs, or not presented in a manner that the child would

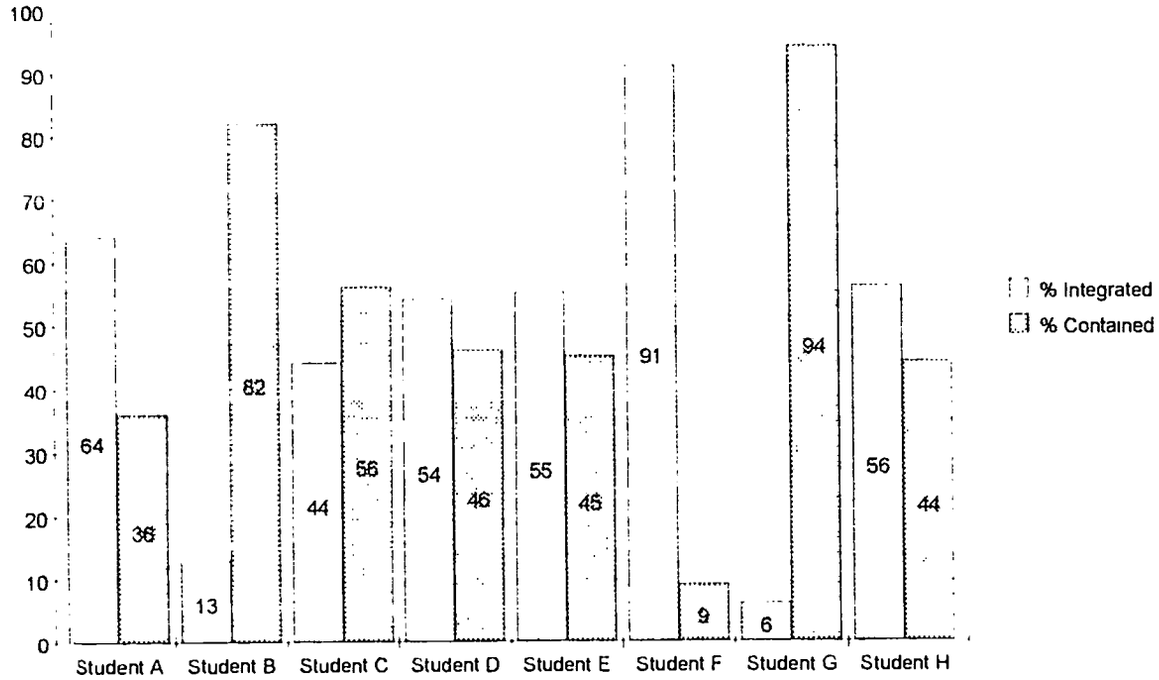


Figure 5. Percentage Time Spent in Integrated and Contained Classes

understand. One parent stated the belief that the curriculum had been "watered down". Only one parent expressed the opinion that the curriculum had been appropriately modified to meet the child's needs. While some of the parents reported varying levels of social acceptance at the Primary (Grades 1-3) and Junior (Grades 4-6) levels, all expressed concern about a lack of social acceptance at the intermediate (Grades 7-8) and senior (Grades 9-Ontario Academic Credits [formerly Grade 13]) levels; only one student had been integrated at the senior level. The children were generally described as being socially isolated, not fitting in, having no real friends - except for the occasional friend with special needs. Parents noted a reliance on peer buddies, tutors, teaching assistants, or the teachers for social interaction. Most children had experienced a marked degree of loneliness. One parent referred to social difficulties as an opportunity to develop social problem solving skills, with the benefit of significant adult intervention.

***Describe and Compare Your Child's Experiences in the Contained Class.***

All parents identified social benefits as being the singularly most important factor for the measured success of the contained placement. The parents perceived their

children to have a true peer group - friends who were accepting, understanding, and tolerant. The increased social interaction at school had the added benefit of spilling over into life after school and on the weekends. For the first time, some students had a social life outside of school, and more importantly, apart from just family. One parent summed up the new social experiences, "My daughter is finally placed where she belongs and is actually having a life. She realizes now she is capable of having friends and relationships." This new sense of self coupled with academic success created a boost in self-confidence, self-esteem, and a sense of belonging. Many parents expressed the opinion that the curriculum was made personally relevant to the interests and functioning levels of their children. However, two parents believed their children were not being challenged enough, that the curriculum was too simplistic and did not reflect the varying abilities within the class. One suggested that the teachers in the contained programs might have lower expectations.

***Why Did You Choose the Contained Class at General Wolfe S.S.? Was an Integrated Setting an Option?***

Six of the eight parents decided on the contained placement on the advice of school board personnel, without

an integrated setting being offered as a choice. One parent was given the option and visited both settings prior to choosing the contained class. The last parent, involved with the separate school board, received only the offer of an integrated setting with resource support. The student remained in this setting for four years, then the parents decided on the contained class because they believed it would better meet her social and academic needs.

***Are We Preparing our Children for the Future by Protecting Them in a Contained Class?***

Interestingly, almost all parents responded, "Yes - we are preparing our children for the future," even though their children were currently being educated within a safe, protected environment. The consensus was that preparation for life within the community occurred outside of school, when their children actually participated in community life through such things as church, recreational and leisure activities, taking the bus, going to a movie or the library, and family functions. School was viewed as the place where, in addition to academic and life skills, social skills were developed with students of similar needs - students who would form the nucleus of a peer group after secondary school. Several parents identified the school's responsibility for developing a community-based curriculum

that would focus on such things as basic level courses, co-operative work placements, transit training, and relationship training.

What Does the Future Hold?

Most parents expressed concern about life after secondary school. Specifically, they voiced concerns around employment opportunities, independent living, and vulnerability. Frequently, they used the term "supported employment", as opposed to competitive employment. Three parents specifically expressed a desire not to have their children attend a sheltered workshop. Most parents wanted to see their children living either on their own or with a friend, but with ongoing family and community agency support. However, coupled with the desire for independent living were the very real concerns about manipulation, vulnerability, and sexual exploitation. One parent expressed the desire to pursue further education for her child through a community college program.

## Discussion

As previously noted, the systematic discrimination against the mentally handicapped has been a barrier to their full participation in community life. The movement towards

social reform (reform that is creating a society more aware and accepting of diversity), has increased focus on the importance of providing for social integration in regular classrooms. Porter and Richler (1991) suggested that increased social relationships will exist in classrooms where teachers plan for peer interaction through building peer relationships, co-operative learning, peer tutoring, peer modelling, and friendship circles. Unfortunately, as the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) (1991) points out, research indicates that the social integration of handicapped students has not been successfully achieved. That is, increased social interaction, increased social acceptance, and behavioural modelling have not taken place. Proximity, then, does not guarantee acceptance; therefore, it appears that ongoing support and sensitization will be necessary to promote the social aspects of integration. Overwhelmingly, the parents who participated in this research study expressed dissatisfaction with the mainstream placement primarily because they perceived their children to be lonely and socially isolated. These results are consistent with the research on parental perceptions of social isolation conducted by Wilgosh, Waggoner, and Adams (1988). While parents were critical of mainstream placements with respect to both social isolation and inappropriate curriculum, they expressed satisfaction with the contained class placement. They perceived their

children to be happy, to have friends, and to be engaged in meaningful, developmentally appropriate curriculum. These findings acknowledge that contained classes may provide social benefits to the developmentally challenged student by creating a sense of belonging and acceptance within a peer group with similar needs.

Results of this research are also consistent with the conclusion reached by Freeman, Kasari, and Alkin (1995) that, based on their childrens' experiences, parents have important beliefs and perspectives which should be factored into educational placement decisions. Nothwithstanding the societal trend toward integration, this particular group of parents clearly articulated its conviction that a contained class is of clear benefit to their DC children. This belief harmonized with the Ontario Ministry of Education's commitment to continue to provide a range of placement options.

In both the integrated and in the contained classes, parents reported a high degree of teacher and administrator acceptance of their DC children. This perception supports the view of the Canadian Education Association (1985) which stated that research has shown that the success of any program designed for the full integration of exceptional pupils rests on the attitudes of school board personnel. OPSBA (1991) identified the need to provide teachers and administrators with in-service education to support

integration. Ostensibly, such education programs have taken place. Yet the parents in the present study perceived teachers in the contained class to be better trained and prepared to program for the DC student than mainstream teachers would be. This suggests that there may be a need to reexamine appropriate preparation for educators through pre-service and ongoing in-service programs. In that regard, the Royal Commission on Learning (1994) detailed extensive recommendations for educators touching on professional issues, teacher education, pre-service programs, evaluating performance, and leadership.

The Royal Commission (1994) acknowledged that, "Teachers in integrated classrooms cannot be expected to teach anyone, with or without disabilities, unless they have the necessary and proper support for doing so" (V.II, p. 110). Educators recognize that the potential for the relative success of integration is largely dependent on the adequacy of available support services. Such services generally include speech and language patholo ists, psychologists, resource teachers, teaching assistants, guidance counsellors, health professionals, and social workers. In this research study, the level and appropriateness of support for students in the mainstream drew criticism. Every parent identified the educational assistant as a critical component of mainstream placement, yet acknowledged that support services and funding were

inadequate. According to OPSBA (1991), there is a need for collaboration and cooperation between the school system and agencies who are to provide these supports. OPSBA further maintained that it is essential for our government to recognize that additional resources, both financial and personnel, must be provided in order to support integration. However, given the current economic situation in Ontario, it appears unlikely that additional funding will be forthcoming. The challenge to school boards will be to reconcile the social idealism of integration with fiscal reality.

Most parents recognize that students with special needs require additional support--support for which parents must actively lobby. Results of this research suggest that a strong, causal relationship exists between involvement with the educational process and advocacy. The more involved parents became with educational issues, the more they recognized the need to be proactive on behalf of their children. The need for, and power of, this relationship has been reinforced in the previously outlined educational reform recommendations in For the Love of Learning (Royal Commission, 1994) and Ontario Ministry of Education (1994) initiatives pertaining to parental involvement. It is now important that not only the Ministry but educators also acknowledge the very significant role parents can have as advocates for their children, given that parental

experiences and perspectives can ultimately influence educational policy and practice.

# CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

## Summary

This study examined parental perspectives on integrated as opposed to contained educational placements for developmentally challenged children. Specifically, this study explored parent experience with elementary and secondary school placements in terms of curriculum, social acceptance, support services, educators, and advocacy. An extensive review of the literature revealed no comparative studies that examined the actual experiences or perspectives of parents and students in integrated as opposed to contained placements.

Three criteria qualified parents for inclusion in this study: the parents had a DC adolescent attending a contained, regional program; the student was identified as educable or mentally retarded; and the student had experience in both integrated and contained educational placements.

Data were gathered in a variety of ways. Parents completed a survey package consisting of a profile sheet and a questionnaire. The profile sheet gathered demographic information on student gender, age, diagnosis, exceptionality, IPRC involvement, class placement, advocacy, support services, and parental expectations regarding curriculum. The 22 item questionnaire explored perspectives

of parents on experience with integrated and contained educational placements, involvement with the Board of Education, and advocacy for their own child. The consent form granted access to the student OSR's enabling the researcher to gather data in order to develop a profile on educational placements. A home interview provided an opportunity to collaboratively explore the issues related to educational placement and curriculum for the developmentally challenged. Further, the interview allowed for a comparative examination of experiences and perspectives between integrated and contained placements.

Results from the survey were presented as an overall frequency of response in both discussion and table form. Various figures illustrated some of the results. Information gathered during the interviews was presented in anecdotal format.

## Conclusions

In a time of educational reform in Ontario, parents represent an important component of that reform, in that their perspectives have the potential to influence educational policy and practice. Both the Ontario Ministry of Education and the Royal Commission on Learning (1994) have acknowledged the significant role parents play in the education of their children. In addition, the Ministry and

the Royal Commission have outlined new initiatives and recommendations to further parental participation in the educational system through partnership, empowerment, and an enhanced advocacy role. Results of this research confirmed that parents have perspectives which may indeed impact on educational policy and practice. The majority of parents were dissatisfied with an integrated educational placement primarily because they perceived their children to be lonely and socially isolated. The parents also identified concerns with curriculum in the mainstream. Conversely, these same parents expressed satisfaction with the contained educational placement as they perceived their children to be happy, to have friends, and to be engaged in meaningful, appropriate curriculum. Parents perceived administrators and teachers to be accepting of their children in both integrated and contained settings. Funding and support services for mainstream placement were considered inadequate, although all parents acknowledged the important role educational assistants had to play. Most parents consistently participated in the IPRC process and IEP development, and all had become advocates for their children. Although the Ontario Ministry of Education encourages integration as the norm, the majority of parents were not given choices with respect to educational placement at the secondary level. The parents identified concerns about future employability, acceptance in society, and

vulnerability. Based on the results of this study, it would appear, then, that parental experiences and perspectives do not support the concept of inclusive education, but do support a range of placement options. These perspectives have significant implications for a government committed to integration as the norm.

## Implications for Practice

In this study parents clearly identified social factors as the main predictors of success in an educational placement for their children with developmental challenges. The implications of this perception for educational practice are several-fold. If the integration of students with a mental handicap is to be successful, the issues of loneliness and social acceptance must be more carefully addressed. Although it can be assumed that various social skills interventions have been tried, those measures apparently have not been sufficient to foster a sense of belonging and happiness. The need to belong is both pervasive and fundamental to the concept of an holistic education. Luftig (1980, cited by Polloway, 1984) reviewed research on the effects of placement on the self-concept of retarded students. Luftig concluded that placing a child in an educational environment where the child could not maintain feelings of self-worth might contribute to

restrictiveness in the school environment (as opposed to the most enabling environment). Social skills training for both the regular and special education student, then, may not be enough; there may be a need to explore the clustering of students with special needs in order to create a peer group. Moreover, the parents in this study indicated that their childrens' academic needs also were best met in the contained special education class. In addition, they identified the areas of life skills, vocational skills, social skills, and communication as the most important components of the program. These perspectives suggest that to date, in the view of this small group of parents, curriculum has not been differentiated enough in the mainstream to meet the needs of the DC student.

Including students with mental handicaps in the regular classroom does not create a new role for the teacher, but requires reassessing traditional practises and attitudes (Porter & Richler, 1991). This notion suggests that teachers must ask what they are teaching, how are they teaching it, and how their teaching can include the handicapped child. It is essential that educators view children with special needs not from the perspective of their disability, but from a holistic perspective. Teachers need to adjust the classroom organization, instructional strategies, and curriculum. Teaching strategies such as multi-level instruction incorporate individualization,

flexibility, and the inclusion of all students, regardless of their skill level. Good educational practice has always allowed for the instruction of students at various levels of cognition; programming for the mentally handicapped child is not fundamentally different. The current research suggests that teachers must consider not only academic issues, but must give increased weight to social/emotional factors.

In the rush to embrace inclusive education, it is important to reflect on the kinds of parental experiences with contained placements that emerged in this study. Clearly, the parents' high level of satisfaction with the contained class coincides with the Royal Commission's (1994) recommendation that, while integration should be the norm, school boards should continue to provide a continuum of services for students whose needs would be best served in other settings.

## Implications for Further Research

Further research to examine the perceptions of both parents and students is necessary to support the current research findings. Although this study will hopefully contribute to the research base on parental perspectives, a larger study controlling for the variables of educational placement and length of placement might yield results that could be generalized to a larger population. Research into

student perceptions of loneliness and social isolation, such as that conducted by Williams and Asher (1992), Luftig (1988), and Taylor (1987) is necessary to confirm parental perceptions. Research into the realm of advocacy could provide insights to further our understanding on this emerging role for parents.

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## Appendix A: AAMR Definition of Mental Retardation

### Four Assumptions Essential to the Application of the 1992 AAMR Definition of Mental Retardation

1. Valid assessment considers cultural and linguistic diversity, as well as differences in communication and behavioural factors.

2. The existence of limitations in adaptive skills occurs within the context of community environments typical of the individual's age peers and is indexed to the person's individualized needs for supports.

3. Specific adaptive limitations often coexist with strengths in other adaptive skills or other personal capabilities.

4. With appropriate supports over a sustained period, the life-functioning of the person with mental retardation will generally improve.

DRAFT

## Table A1 - Enrolment of exceptional students, by exceptionality and level of integration Elementary and Secondary 1993

| Exceptionality | Special Classes | | Regular Classes | | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Fully self-contained[1] | Partially integrated[2] | Withdrawal assistance[3] | Resource assistance[4] | Indirect service[5] | |
| **Behavioural** | | | | | | |
| Socially maladjusted | 1,682 | 1,767 | 2,635 | 2,415 | 1,489 | 9,988 |
| **Communicational** | | | | | | |
| Autistic | 248 | 211 | 563 | 553 | 94 | 1,669 |
| Hard of hearing, deaf[a] | 320 | 267 | 585 | 559 | 550 | 2,281 |
| Learning disabled | 6,403 | 11,661 | 30,342 | 25,720 | 7,312 | 81,438 |
| Speech and language impaired | 1,341 | 1,514 | 3,501 | 2,183 | 793 | 9,332 |
| **Intellectual** | | | | | | |
| Gifted | 6,477 | 4,572 | 9,316 | 6,051 | 5,651 | 32,067 |
| Educable retarded | 4,049 | 4,026 | 3,032 | 1,984 | 830 | 13,921 |
| Developmentally disabled | 3,692 | 1,028 | 350 | 379 | 113 | 5,562 |
| **Physical** | | | | | | |
| Visually impaired, blind, deaf-blind[b] | 56 | 37 | 212 | 256 | 141 | 702 |
| Other physical disabilities | 96 | 138 | 384 | 655 | 438 | 1,711 |
| **Multiple** | | | | | | |
| Multihandicapped | 1,777 | 1,023 | 896 | 1,051 | 363 | 5,110 |
| Total | 26,141 | 26,244 | 51,816 | 41,806 | 17,774 | 163,781 |
| Central Region | 18,221 | 18,887 | 31,590 | 24,140 | 9,301 | 102,139 |
| Eastern Region | 3,370 | 4,236 | 7,677 | 6,811 | 3,080 | 25,174 |
| Midnorthern Region | 647 | 560 | 2,289 | 1,551 | 1,097 | 6,144 |
| Northeastern Region | 578 | 336 | 2,044 | 1,477 | 653 | 5,088 |
| Northwestern Region | 215 | 243 | 1,122 | 611 | 388 | 2,579 |
| Western Region | 3,110 | 1,982 | 7,094 | 7,216 | 3,255 | 22,657 |
| Northern Regions | 1,440 | 1,139 | 5,455 | 3,639 | 2,138 | 13,811 |
| Southern Regions | 24,701 | 25,105 | 46,361 | 38,167 | 15,636 | 149,970 |
| Public schools | 23,889 | 21,425 | 36,746 | 29,424 | 13,979 | 125,463 |
| Roman Catholic schools | 2,252 | 4,819 | 15,070 | 12,382 | 3,795 | 38,318 |
| English | 25,143 | 25,563 | 48,687 | 40,467 | 17,066 | 156,926 |
| French | 998 | 681 | 3,129 | 1,339 | 708 | 6,855 |
| Male | 17,027 | 17,514 | 33,685 | 27,575 | 11,426 | 107,227 |
| Female | 9,114 | 8,730 | 18,131 | 14,231 | 6,348 | 56,554 |

Source: Elementary and Secondary schools September Report 1993

Data exclude students in hospital schools, provincial and demonstration schools, Care, Treatment and Correctional facilities.

[1] Exceptional students attend a self-contained special education class for the entire school day.

[2] Exceptional students are enrolled in a self-contained special education class for more than 50 per cent of their instructional time and are also integrated into a regular class for at least one instructional period daily.

[3] Exceptional students are enrolled in a regular class for more than 50 per cent of their instructional time and receive instruction outside the classroom by a qualified special education teacher for part of the school day.

[4] Exceptional students are enrolled in a regular class and receive direct specialized instruction, individually or in small groups, by a special education teacher within the regular classroom.

[5] Exceptional students are enrolled in a regular class where the board provides specialized consultative services to the classroom teacher only.

[a] Includes 600 students in deaf alternative program.



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

January 10, 1994

Dear Parent(s),

Like you, I am the parent of a child attending the special education program at General Wolfe High School in Oakville. As parents, we have experienced a variety of educational programs and placements for our children over the years. These placements may have included special, contained classes and regular, mainstreamed classes.

As an itinerant resource teacher for the Peel Board of Education, I provide program support for developmentally challenged children. In addition, I am now in the final stages of completing a Master of Education degree in the area of curriculum from Brock University. Throughout my course work, I have focussed on programming issues related to developmentally challenged students.

I believe it is important for educators to know our perspectives as parents on the issues of placement and what we would like to see reflected in the curricula for our children. We have often had to make difficult decisions with respect to the best educational setting. Therefore, I am conducting a study to examine parental perspectives on the issues of contained, as opposed to mainstreamed, placement. Dr. Helen Stewart, from Brock University, will be the faculty advisor for this study.

For my study, I am asking for your assistance in completing a questionnaire and profile sheet concerning questions on program and placement for your child. A number of parents would also be asked if they would be willing to participate in an interview to provide more detailed information on why the program at General Wolfe was selected. In addition, I would like to review your child's OSR (Ontario Student Record) to develop a profile on previous class placements and programs.

In this package you will find a parent letter, a consent form, a profile sheet and a questionnaire. Please read and sign the consent form indicating whether you will agree to participate or not. It is important that the form be returned in either case. If you agree to take part in this study, please complete the enclosed profile sheet and questionnaire to assist in data gathering.

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. All of your responses to the questionnaire, profile sheet, interview, as well as your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

Results of this study will be shared at a future Parent Support Group meeting at General Wolfe S.S. In addition, parents may access a copy of the research study.

Please return the attached consent form, profile sheet, and questionnaire as soon as possible. Should you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact me at:

Daytime - (905)858-3133
Evening - (905)845-2280

I would like to thank you for taking the time to read this letter, and for being willing to consider participating in this study. It is my firm belief that the results of this study will benefit not only our children, but also those yet to come.

Sincerely,

Cindy Perras

## Parental Perspectives on Mainstream as Opposed to Contained Placements for Developmentally Challenged Adolescents

We, _____, hereby agree to take part in a study examining parental perspectives on educational placements for developmentally challenged adolescents. This study will be conducted by Cindy Perras in partial fulfilment for the degree of Master of Education, Brock University. In agreeing to participate, we understand that:

1. We consent to examination of our child's OSR (Ontario Student Record).
2. We will be required to complete a questionnaire.
3. We may be selected to participate in a one session interview at our convenience if we indicate a willingness to do so.
4. There are no risks whatsoever involved.
5. We may have access to the results of this study.
6. We may withdraw from this study at any time and this will in no way affect our child's education.
7. Any information will be kept strictly confidential and safely stored under lock and key.
8. If results are published, neither we or our child will be identified in any way.
9. We agree to return the completed questionnaire by January 28, 1994.

Dated this _____ day of January, 1994.

_____ _____

Witness' Signature Signature

_____

Name: (Please Print)

_____ _____

Witness' Signature Signature

_____

Name: (Please Print)

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at:

Daytime - (905)858-3133
Evening - (905)845-2280
Dr. Helen Stewart - (905)688-5550, ext. 4301

1. My child is: female _____
   male _____

2. My child's birthdate is _____.

3. My child has attended the special education program at General Wolfe S.S. for _____ years.

4. Prior to secondary school, my child attended elementary school at:

   a public school _____
   a separate school _____
   a private school _____

   If private, name of school:
   _____

5. My child had been in both mainstream and contained classes:

   yes _____
   no _____

6. My child has been declared exceptional by an Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC):

   yes _____
   no _____

   If yes, name the exceptionality:
   _____

7. Does your child have any other diagnosed conditions or syndromes?
   yes _____
   no _____

   If yes, identify conditions/syndromes:
   _____

   _____

8. My child receives the following support services from the school board:

_____

_____

9. My child receives the following community/government support services:

_____

_____

_____

10. My child lives with: both parents _____
mother _____
father _____
guardian _____
other _____

11. I belong to the following groups/associations:

_____

_____

12. I participate in the Parent Support Group at the secondary school: yes _____
no _____

13. My child's program should focus on:

| | Yes | No | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|
| functional academics | _____ | _____ | _ _ |
| computer skills | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| recreational/leisure skills | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| vocational skills | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| social skills | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| life skills | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| communication skills | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| other _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |

Please rank the above program areas in order of priority.

14. I am willing to participate in an individual interview session arranged at my convenience:

yes _____
no _____

name:_____

signature:_____

telephone:_____

Below you will find 22 statements. Read each one and decide whether or not you agree with each. Under each statement you will see the words "strongly agree", "agree", "undecided, "disagree", and "strongly disagree". Under each word or words is a number. Circle the number under each word or words which best describes whether you agree or disagree with the statement, and how strongly you feel.

1. Placement in a mainstream class best met my child's academic needs.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

2. My child was happy in the mainstream.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

3. My child had friends in the mainstream.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

4. The curriculum in the mainstream was modified to meet my child's needs.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

5. My child was socially accepted by his/her non-disabled peers in the mainstream.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

6. Mainstream teachers accepted my child.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

7. School administrators were supportive of my child's placement in the mainstream.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

8. Support services were adequate in the mainstream.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

9. Educational assistants were an important support for my child in the mainstream.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

10. My child was lonely in the mainstream.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

11. Funding is adequate to support special needs children in the mainstream.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

12. My child's current placement in the contained special education class best meets his/her academic needs.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

13. My child is happier in the contained class.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

14. My child has friends in the contained class.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

15. Teachers in the contained class have a positive attitude towards my child.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

16. Teachers in contained classes appear better trained and prepared to program for developmentally challenged students than mainstream teachers.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

17. School administrators are supportive of the contained class.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

18. I have consistently had input into the educational placement of my child.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

19. I have consistently contributed to the development of my child's Individual Education Plan (IEP).

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

20. I believe the school board values my opinions concerning my child's education.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

21. I believe it is important to be part of an advocacy group for my child.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

22. I have personally become an advocate for my child for educational issues.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Part I - Confirmation of Data:

a) student's name _____
b) birthdate _____
c) exceptionality _____
d) diagnosis _____

Part II- Educational Profile:

| Program/Placement | Exceptionality | Year |
|---|---|---|
| K | | |
| 1 | | |
| 2 | | |
| 3 | | |
| 4 | | |
| 5 | | |
| 6 | | |
| 7 | | |
| 8 | | |
| S1 | | |
| S2 | | |
| S3 | | |
| S4 | | |
| S5 | | |
| S6 | | |
| S7 | | |

1. Describe your child's experiences in the mainstream.

2. Describe and compare your child's experiences in the contained class.

3. Why did you choose the contained class at General Wolfe S.S.? Was an integrated setting an option?

4. Are we preparing our children for the future by protecting them in a contained class?

5. What does the future hold?